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PRETORIA'S RIGHT-WING OPPOSITION: PROSPECTS FOR THE NATIONAL PARTY

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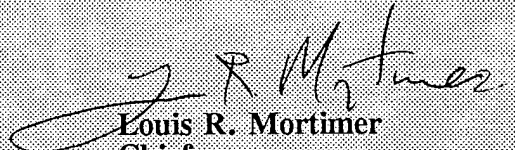
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PRETORIA'S RIGHT-WING OPPOSITION
Prospects for the National Party

KEY JUDGMENTS

South Africa's ruling National Party (NP) is pursuing a course of limited reform in the hope of establishing peace within its borders and improving its international standing. Planned reforms stop short of full voting rights for the black majority, however, so domestic unrest will increase. To counter the escalating violence, the NP is pursuing a second, equally important goal of strengthening South Africa's already impressive security network.

The Conservative Party (CP), parliamentary opposition since May 1987, is altering the balance between these dual pursuits, pressing for a greater emphasis on security and a halt to reform. Political stability and the protection of white privilege are the primary goals of right-wing whites, who reject the pursuit of international respectability as unworthy of a strong Afrikaner-dominated government.

The NP will continue to pursue its planned reforms, but at a slower pace, and will continue to lose conservative support. This loss will be partially offset by gains from the former opposition Progressive Federal Party (PFP). The climate of violence will intensify, and with it, right-wing pressures for stronger security. This pattern will contribute to changes in the composition of the NP and the growth of right-wing groups but will not enable the CP to win majority support within the foreseeable future.

Significant external assistance to South Africa's far right will not materialize unless the government loses its ability to meet the threat of civil war. Hostility toward neighboring states will escalate, resulting in stepped up military strikes and economic countersanctions. Regional negotiations will be stalled. The Soviet Union will attempt to exploit opportunities to counter Western influence in the region.

South Africa's rightward shift will jeopardize US interests, delay the implementation of more democratic values, increase regional instability, slow the pace of economic and political development, and prolong South Africa's international pariah status.

The year 1988, the sesquicentennial anniversary of the Boer victory at Blood River, will be important for South African whites. Right-wing groups, jockeying for leadership of the far right, will reaffirm Afrikaner beliefs in the importance of their culture and inspire the most conservative of South African whites to withstand pressures for change.

A. INTRODUCTION

South Africa's ruling National Party (NP) is undertaking cautious reforms in apartheid, stopping short of full voting rights for blacks. Even minimal reforms are being delayed in order to counter right-wing opposition within the NP and from others of the far right.

The NP is also seeking to strengthen South Africa's already impressive security machine to counter external and internal threats, as black resentment and frustration collide with the right-wing backlash. Right-wing groups are influencing this dual process by slowing the pace of reform and increasing the emphasis on security. The short-term effect is likely to be sharply escalating violence. A longer-term concern is the Conservative Party challenge to the NP majority.

The major disagreement between the NP and its right-wing opponents is whether stability and prosperity will be ensured by expanding or further restricting the rights of the nation's black majority. NP leaders, including President Botha, favor some improvement in black political and economic standing. The conservative opposition favors a return to stricter apartheid, including the implementation of a comprehensive homeland policy to provide limited rights for blacks in separate locations, and, for the far right, the establishment of an all-white state excluding blacks entirely.

B. CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION

The Afrikaners' belief in their status as a chosen people emerged during the 250 years of warfare, poverty, and sacrifice that marked their settlement in the region. Convinced of Afrikaner moral and racial superiority, the NP began organizing to take control of government in 1902, following a humiliating military defeat at British hands. During the years of political maneuvering, NP organizers became increasingly belligerent, and by 1948 had achieved reputations for disrupting opponents' political rallies and preventing opposing viewpoints from being heard. Following a narrow electoral victory in 1948, the NP constructed a legal infrastructure implementing racial separation, or apartheid, relegating the nation's black majority to second-class economic and political status.

Protests by the black majority, a continuous feature of 20th-century politics, escalated into violent clashes at Sharpeville in 1960 and Soweto in 1976. Eventually, repressive government policies provoked international demands for the extension of democratic rights beyond the white minority.

The NP took a marginal step toward multiracial government in 1984, implementing a controversial constitutional arrangement which called for a tricameral segregated parliament, to include representatives of

"Asians" and "coloreds" but not blacks. New levels of violent protest resulted in the imposition of states of emergency in 1985 and 1986, along with strict press censorship.

The NP, pressured by calls for reform and international sanctions, scheduled parliamentary by-elections in May 1987 to consolidate support and fend off growing right-wing opposition. The NP won a strong majority in the all-white House of Assembly, but the Conservative Party replaced the pro-reform Progressive Federal Party (PFP) as opposition party, as white voters registered their fear of anarchy and black domination.

C. RIGHT-WING GROUPS

1. Introduction

Conservative critics of government belong to an array of political and cultural organizations, the largest of which is the official parliamentary opposition, the Conservative Party (CP). Its weaker rival, the Herstigte Nasionale Party (HNP), or Reconstituted National Party, is more conservative and more openly racist. Other right-wing groups identify themselves as cultural organizations in order to avoid legal restrictions on political activity and to express their contempt for mainstream national politics.

Policies and premises of right-wing groups range along a spectrum of essentially racist beliefs, with intragroup factions as divisive as disagreements among groups. Their differences are being minimized at present in an effort to forge right-wing unity and counter NP reform from a position of strength.

2. Conservative Party

The CP was formed in 1982, when 17 MPs led by former Minister Andries Treurnicht defected from the NP to protest against the proposed multiracial parliamentary system. It has intensified its battle against reform in the past 5 years, winning votes from the NP right wing and support from rural and urban blue-collar populations.

The CP registered impressive strength in the 1987 by-elections, with over 540,000 votes out of a total of 2.1 million. CP strength also turned at least 10 NP strongholds into marginal NP victories, promising close races in the next election. Although all 22 CP victories came in the Transvaal, the CP also won 43 percent of the vote in the Orange Free State, where right-wing strength will continue to increase.

The CP does not espouse violence and is the most respectable of right-wing groups, actively working to win members among English-speakers as well as Afrikaners. CP policy would include strict enforcement of the government's homeland policies and additional restrictions on Asians and "coloreds" to protect white interests.

3. Herstigte Nasionale Party

The HNP broke away from the NP in the turmoil of the 1960s. The split in 1969, precipitated by rancorous debate over multiracial sporting events, was traumatic for the heretofore monolithic Afrikaner community with the far right predicting a "downward slide" into multiracialism and the destruction of Afrikaner culture.

Andries Treurnicht was among the conservatives who refused to join the HNP in 1969, generating hostility that intensified in 1972 when the Broederbond, under Treurnicht's leadership, expelled HNP members. Personality clashes between HNP leader Jaap Marais and Treurnicht also contributed to the failure of an attempted HNP-CP merger in 1987. The HNP went on to win 64,500 votes in the 1987 elections, drawing blue-collar votes from the HNP and CP and spoiling several CP victories, but losing its only seat in parliament.

The HNP exhibits a greater degree of xenophobia than the CP and a more singleminded pursuit of Afrikaner dominance, favoring strict prohibitions on blacks, "coloreds," and "Asians." HNP rhetoric supports the unrealistic proposal to "repatriate" South Africans of Asian descent to India, and would adopt Afrikaans as the sole official language. HNP leaders have tentatively agreed to drop these demands in order to achieve right-wing unity, but many HNP members are determined to revive the group's policy favoring a separate Boer state.

4. Afrikaanse Weerstandsbeweging

The Afrikaanse Weerstandsbeweging (AWB), or Afrikaner Resistance Movement, was formed in 1973 by the charismatic and fanatical Eugene Terreblanche, based on his Afrikaner chauvinism and open admiration for Adolf Hitler. The AWB is reminiscent of the Ossewabrandwag, or "Ox-wagon Guards," a group known for attempting to subvert South Africa's support for the allies in World War II. AWB symbolism is laden with reminders of European Nazism.

Terreblanche describes the AWB as both a cultural organization that eschews national politics--partly the result of his unsuccessful attempts to win political office--and as an umbrella organization aimed at right wing unity. The AWB shares the blue-collar image of

the HNP, but Terreblanche has closer ties to the CP, and most members of the AWB probably voted along CP lines in 1987.

Terreblanche's rhetoric is laced with threats of violence and allusions to the Afrikaners' right to use force to defend their interests. (Terreblanche received a suspended sentence for the illegal possession of automatic weapons in 1982.) Two paramilitary branches of the AWB, the Brandwag ("Sentinels") and the Stormvalke ("Storm Falcons"), provide paramilitary training for AWB youth, who are lectured on the dual threat of internal unrest and Communism. AWB rallies gather as many as 10,000, but the group's strength is not measurable in terms of votes and may be less than 4,000.

5. Other Right-Wing Groups

A number of smaller ultra-rightist groups influence the focus of political debate among whites. Most visible among these are the Afrikaner Volkswag (AV), under the leadership of Carel Boshoff, and the Oranjewerkers, led by Hendrik Verwoerd. Both groups envision a separate state set aside for whites. Some members of the Volkswag and Oranjewerkers are also active in the AWB.

The Blanke Bevrydigingsbeweging (BBB), or White Freedom Movement, led by John Schabert, was relatively unknown until its members threatened both blacks and whites who participated in multiracial discussions of South Africa's future in mid-1987. The BBB threatens violence against white "traitors" to the Afrikaner cause, including members of other right-wing groups. Several other fringe groups advocate violence in defense of Afrikaner supremacy and have condemned US policy in the region, but their popular support is minimal at present.

6. Shifting Political Alignments

The political profile of South African whites has changed in the past 5 years. The PFP, once the home of most anti-apartheid sentiment among whites, is now a small enclave consisting primarily of wealthy, urban, white English-speakers. The NP, once an all-Afrikaner party, garnered nearly half the English-speaking vote in 1987 and now pursues a dual program of racial reform and white privilege. The CP, once considered extremist, now includes many Afrikaner nationalists and has a growing constituency among English-speaking blue-collar workers and lower-level civil servants. Right-wing extremists are still well represented in the CP, but are more at home in the HNP or fringe groups of the far right.

The most important causes of the shifting political terrain are the NP program of limited reform; the economic threat to working-class whites; the escalating climate of violence; the PFP's inability to present a strong program for quelling unrest and its lack of commitment to the preservation of white dominance; and the right-wing appeal to Afrikaner cultural chauvinism.

D. PROSPECTS FOR THE RIGHT

1. Slowing the Pace of Reform

Conservative groups will hamper NP efforts to make apartheid more palatable to the black majority. The threatened white backlash will color the political debate, allowing the NP to water down or ignore recommendations for reform. Militant opponents of reform will seek to capitalize on white fears of economic and political loss, as the dynamic of ethnocentric retrenchment begins to replace pragmatic change.

The right wing has already successfully blocked improvements in black living standards and will increase its efforts in this area. Conservative MPs, who question the need for increased expenditures on blacks, will delay or eliminate proposed improvements in services for blacks, especially in education, which is a focal point for both conservatives and reformers who hope to influence the nation's future.

Right-wing rhetoric will also confirm stereotypes held by extremists, both black and white, who prefer a debate devoid of moderates. White political rhetoric will tend toward nostalgic reminders of Verwoerdian tenets which were used during the 1950s and 1960s. Black militants, in turn, will hear their stereotypes of white racism confirmed.

2. Escalating Violence

Violence in South Africa will intensify. Frustrated by inadequate reforms, black dissidents will step up attacks on symbols of the state and its representatives. African National Congress (ANC) leader Oliver Tambo exhorted his followers to "intensify the armed struggle" based on the May 1987 elections results. The ANC, United Democratic Front (UDF), and rival black consciousness groups are extending their reach into isolated rural areas. More moderate dissident leaders are losing control of their followers as increasingly radical black youth view peaceful negotiation as futile.

Right-wing vigilantism, driven by the white backlash, will increase in response to black protests. AWB leader Terreblanche's rhetoric

openly favors violence, and the AWB has shown a willingness to engage in terrorist acts. The AWB is organizing neighborhood patrols in small towns and will provoke clashes between black and white youth, going beyond its former role perpetrating petty violence and political pranks. Lacking a revolutionary strategy, the group is not likely to undertake large-scale sabotage, and Terreblanche's vision of himself as forging right-wing unity will temporarily deflect the AWB's bullying tactics from members of the CP and HNP.

The police are notoriously slow to react to AWB violence, in part because the police force and right-wing groups have overlapping membership. Some police officers are uncertain about their responsibility for protecting blacks against white violence.

The possibility of alliances between right-wing whites and Inkatha-based black vigilantes, although improbable, cannot be ruled out. Conservative whites and the large Zulu population represented by Inkatha share many common opponents, including ANC and UDF militants. They also share suspicions of anti-apartheid pressure groups outside South Africa, and both groups exhibit elitist attitudes toward members of their own race.

Some right-wing violence is also likely to be directed against the nation's small Asian population, the focal point of a right-wing debate over the establishment of an Asian homeland or their "repatriation" to India. This population includes many shopkeepers and businessmen, who may find themselves the object of hate campaigns both because of the capital they command and out of resentment of their partial enfranchisement in 1984.

South Africa's Jewish community numbering just over 100,000 will probably become the target for some AWB-inspired violence, given Terreblanche's emulation of Hitler and Israeli pressures on Pretoria to implement reform. Among Terreblanche's supporters are the same "lumpenproletariat" that cheered Hitler's rantings in the 1930s, and the threatening economic decline in South Africa has causes not unlike those facing Germany between world wars.

3. Bolstering Security

The far right will increase its influence by expanding its membership in security organizations and by rallying conservative strength in parliament to enact harsher security legislation. Internal violence will appear to vindicate hardliners on national security, especially those who see all threats against the state as part of a Communist-inspired "total onslaught."

The AWB is particularly adept at placing its members in community organizations to represent right-wing interests. The CP is also well represented among police officers, some of whom are also members of

the AWB, despite official police edicts prohibiting AWB membership. AWB youth training emphasizes the preparation for police careers, and the AWB has offered to pay legal fees for officers who are accused of AWB membership and lose their jobs.

It is also a reasonable assumption that right-wing groups are well represented in the far-reaching National Security Management System (NSMS), which serves as a clearinghouse for security information within the government. The Joint Management Committees (JMCs), which make up the lower tiers of the NSMS, include local police officers and military personnel, many of whom are also members of right-wing groups.

The military also forms the core of a new network of security committees, the Defence Manpower Liaison Committees (DMLCs), intended to complement JMCs by concentrating on the coordination of manpower allocation among security and economic sectors. The resulting mosaic of overlapping memberships among security and right-wing organizations includes the SADF, police force, NSMS, DMLCs, and political and cultural organizations to the right of the NP.

Members of right-wing groups will increase their access to arms by their close ties with the security establishment. The SADF policy of arming rural residents of the northern Transvaal for self-defense provides weapons to conservative strongholds. Even without government-supplied arms, whites can easily purchase a wide variety of weapons throughout the country. This easy access, along with the lack of funds, makes it unlikely that right-wing paramilitary groups will acquire imported weapons in the foreseeable future.

4. Challenging NP Dominance

The CP is likely to register further gains in the next election, drawing votes from the right wing of the NP; however, a major foreign policy crisis would be necessary to allow the CP to convert its opposition status into a parliamentary majority. Tradition and Afrikaner solidarity will help the NP promote its reform-plus-security agenda.

The PFP, which won less than half the number of votes polled by the CP and HNP together in 1987, is not expected to regain its status as opposition party in the next election. Some PFP members will probably support NP candidates in the next election to counterbalance the far right or out of disillusionment with the liberal leadership. A PFP bolt from parliament is considered a possible, although not likely, result of the Party's increasing irrelevance to the parliamentary process. The NP would benefit by the disappearance of its former opposition, however, and may be campaigning behind the scenes to accomplish this.

An unintended and ironic effect of right-wing growth could be the strengthening of the liberal faction of the NP. CP growth in the Transvaal Province will draw support from the NP, which is led by the conservative F.W. deKlerk. CP gains at the expense of the NP in the Transvaal would strengthen the more liberal Cape Province NP. The reform-minded Cape NP leader Heunis would benefit by the weakening support for his conservative rival, deKlerk.

NP leadership following President Botha's retirement or death will have little impact on the NP's majority status. A conservative successor, such as Minister of National Education F.W. DeKlerk, would stem defections from the NP to the right. A liberal successor, such as Minister of Education and Development Aid G. Viljoen or Minister of Constitutional Development and Planning J.C. Heunis, would not destroy the NP majority.

Leadership changes in the HNP and CP will probably not alter the relative popularity of these groups, although a CP-HNP merger would be easier without archrivals Treurnicht and Marais. CP deputy C. Mulder has forged ties between the CP and AWB, which would be weakened by his departure from politics, predicted because of his recent diagnosis of cancer.

4. Reinforcing South Africa's International Isolation

Current NP foreign policy already reflects right-wing attitudes to a large degree, but the rightward shift in domestic politics signals an increase in regional tensions and reinforcement of South Africa's international pariah status. Pressures for negotiated peace accords will decline, and Namibian independence negotiations will continue to be stalled. South Africa's success in supporting Mozambican rebels may translate into aid to antigovernment rebels in Zimbabwe. Violations of Nkomati and Lusaka Accords with Mozambique and Angola will increase, and Pretoria will come under increased pressure to conduct military strikes against Botswana and other front-line states which allow ANC access to South Africa's borders. The Soviet Union will attempt to exploit regional clashes to counter Western influence.

South Africa will probably impose countersanctions on its black neighbors whose economies are dependent on South Africa's more highly developed infrastructure. Some of South Africa's one million or more foreign workers may be repatriated to neighboring states, a move that would damage their weakened economies. South Africa may also consider dismantling the Southern Africa Customs Union or alter the formula by which Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland share export revenues.

Ultra-conservatives in the Afrikaner community have long argued that international meddling threatens to destroy their economic wellbeing.

Their overall isolationist outlook, coupled with international sanctions, will continue to distance them from foreign sources of capital. Economic stagnation will intensify the threat perceived by working-class whites, and economic disarray in general will strengthen the right wing in South Africa's narrow political spectrum. The predicted near- to mid-term improvement in the local economy, as domestic production supplants imports, may help offset this threat.

5. Reinforcing Afrikaner Values

Right-wing rhetoric extols traditional Afrikaner values, including the defense of the "Volk," the need for demonstrating "kragdadigheid," or forcefulness in foreign policy, the pursuit of "vryheid," or freedom for the Volk. NP leaders will continue to rely on the fiery rhetoric and charismatic presence of right-wing leaders Terreblanche and Marais to remind Afrikaners of these values, speaking in Afrikaans, and to generate support for aggressive action against opponents in South Africa and the region.

South Africa's conservative newspapers, including the English-language daily, The Citizen, assist in this preservation of values, emphasizing the distinction between right-wing allegiance to tradition and the government's willingness to compromise on some racial issues, and by exaggerating the extent of the police response to right-wing violence. This coverage contrasts sharply with Afrikaans media, which support the NP, and the more liberal English press, which portrays the right wing as a fringe element in white politics.

6. Pressing for Partition

The creation of an all-white mini-state is likely to be considered seriously at some point, if only as a means of controlling an embarrassing extremist faction of whites. At that point, the debate will center around the maintenance of Afrikaner domination over other whites within the proposed "Boerestaat," the use of all-white labor, and the dilemma of diplomatic relations with black states--points already being discussed in far-right circles. International outrage will not prevent an attempt to implement this troubling proposal.

F. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

1. Rejection of American Political Values

US-South African relations will suffer as a result of right-wing success in slowing the pace of reform. Democratic values are openly

rejected by the far right, and Washington will come under increased domestic and international pressure to abandon remaining ties with Pretoria. Organized on principles antithetical to American values, reviled by US allies, and threatening to other African states, South Africa under white rule will be a dangerous ally for the United States. At the same time, it would be a threatening adversary, with economic and military strength unsurpassed on the continent.

2. Blocking US Goals in the Region

The rightward shift in government coupled with the slow pace of reform will discourage leaders of some neighboring states, who already place little hope in negotiations with Pretoria. Escalating regional tensions, Pretoria's military strikes against neighboring states, and economic moves to weaken regional economies will slow the already glacial pace of political and diplomatic progress in the region. These political and economic strains will damage US goals, contribute to overall instability, hinder economic development, and increase opportunities for Soviet exploitation of unrest.

3. Limiting US Options

A weak NP response to right-wing violence could provoke further sanctions and pressures for adherence to international standards regarding human rights. If the government were to halt reform, step up forced resettlement, enforce non-viable homeland policies, and permit right-wing vigilantism against blacks, Asians, and minorities within the white community, international demands for the United States to apply new pressures to a government that has never been under US control would escalate. In this event, the potential for US influence over Pretoria would be at a low point, and options for US intervention would be sharply reduced--possibly to a choice between stronger sanctions against South Africa and stepped up assistance to front-line states.

E. CONCLUSIONS

President Botha does not intend to press for full voting rights for blacks. Rather, he hopes to adopt some form of powersharing in order to quell unrest and improve South Africa's international standing. Paralleling this modest effort to achieve a more democratic, multiracial state will be efforts to bolster military and internal security to contain persisting violence. The goal is a society in which Afrikaner autonomy and privilege are preserved, along with the Afrikaner self-image as a "just" people, living in accordance with what is seen as a God-given plan.

Right-wing opposition will not be eliminated or co-opted as long as this dual program is pursued. Rather, it will oppose reform and press for security, bolstering this pressure with violence. Right-wing successes will result in the continuation of government repression against blacks, a slower pace of even minimal reforms, stepped up attacks on neighboring states, and other moves against citizens and foreigners who are not white. The United States will come under increased pressure to distance itself from Pretoria and provide assistance to front-line states which oppose its limited reform agenda. This agenda presents few options for strengthening US leadership in this troubled region.

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